

Firesetting Intervention

Office of the
State Fire Marshal



A guide for parents of children and youth involved with firesetting.

Firesetting by children is a problem that needs immediate attention. In Washington State, children with access to ignition devices set fires that took 21 lives during 1998-2003. The victims of these fires are the children themselves and their family members. Other victims of intentionally set fires include schools and wildlands. Gaining an understanding of firesetting will help to prevent it.

1. **Children and Fire** — What you can do

Most children set fires out of curiosity. Others are reactionary, because they are upset and need attention.

- ☐ An understanding of the power of fire is important. A fire can get out of control in seconds, can double in size every minute, and can overcome an entire home in just five minutes.
- ☐ Controlling access to matches, lighters, and other materials that can start fires is critical. Store matches and lighters in locked containers. Teach children if they find matches or lighters to tell an adult.
- ☐ Increase supervision of children. Track your child's activities. Ask yourself, "Is my child adequately supervised? Are there ways I can provide more supervision?"

2. **Understanding Youth Firesetting**

Teenagers set fires for many reasons -- a prank, a dare, or to cover a crime; most don't realize they are breaking the law and could go to jail.

- ☐ Parents have primary responsibility for teaching their children and youth the proper uses and dangers of fire.
- ☐ Parents must also teach independence, responsibility and decision making. When parents don't provide these skills to a child, the child may act impulsively and make poor choices.
- ☐ Legal responsibility – At age 12 or older, youth can get in legal trouble for committing a crime such as arson and may have to go to court with their parents. Possible punishment includes:
 - Community supervision Restitution
 - Community Service Detention/commitment

3. **Getting Help** — Regardless of how severe the firesetting behavior, you can get help

- ☐ Firestoppers Network of Washington is a group dedicated to firesetting issues in 13 of Washington's 39 counties. For information about the Juvenile Firesetting Intervention Coalition nearest you contact the Office of the State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0435 or e-mail karen.jones@wsp.wa.gov. For information on line visit: <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/fire/arsonpre.htm>
- ☐ Workbooks – The publications listed below are available for use with families of children who have been involved with firesetting. These workbooks have been developed to meet the need for effective education tools for kids who misuse fire. For more information contact Arson Alarm Foundation at 206-264-3330.
 - [A Family's Response to Firesetting](#), information for caregivers;
 - [A Workbook for Kids About Fire](#), aimed at the older child and adolescents;
 - [A Kid's Fire Safety Workbook](#), developed for younger children.